Islam in Brief

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I. What is Islam ?

Islam (in Arabic) means submission to the will of Allah and obedience to His law. Everything and every phenomenon in the world, other than man is administrated totally by Allah-made laws. Hence, they are obedient and submissive to His laws i.e. they are in the state of Islam. Islam is derived from the Arabic root *"Sa-li-ma"* that means: peace, purity, submission and obedience.

Man possesses the inherent qualities of intelligence and choice, thus he is ***invited*** to submit to the good will of Allah and obey His law i.e. become a Muslim.

Submission to the good will of Allah, together with obedience to His beneficial law i.e. becoming a Muslim, is the best safeguard for man's peace and harmony.

In this sense, Islam is the common message conveyed to Adam and to all Allah's Prophets and Messengers, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

In its final form revealed to Allah's last Messenger Muhammad, the message has been restored, completed and finalized.

The word ***"Allah"*** in the Arabic Language means God, or more accurately: The One and Only Eternal God, Creator of the Universe, Lord of all lords, King of all kings, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. The word Allah to mean God: is also used by Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians as well.

II. Articles of Faith

1- A Muslim believes in One God: ***Allah***, Superme and Eternal, Infinite and Mighty, Merciful and Compassionate, Creator and Provider.

Allah has no father nor mother, no son nor daughter. He has not fathered anyone nor was He fathered. None equal to Him. He is God of all mankind, not of a special tribe or race.

Allah is High and Supreme, but He is very near to the pious thoughtful believers; He answers their prayers and helps them. He loves the people who love Him and forgives their sins. He gives them peace, happiness, knowledge and success.

Allah is the Loving and the Provider, the Generous and the Benevolent, the Rich and the Independent, the Forgiving and the Clement, the Patient and the Appreciative, the Unique and the Protector, the Judge and the Peace. Allah's attributes are mentioned in the Qur'an.

Allah creates in man the mind to understand, the soul and conscience to be good and righteous, the feelings and sentiments to be kind and humane. If we try to count His favors upon us, we cannot, because they are countless.

In return for all the great favors and mercy, Allah does not need anything from us, because He is Needless and Independent.

Allah asks us to know Him, to love Him and to enforce His Law for our own benefit and our own good.

2- A Muslim believes in ***all the Messengers and Prophets of Allah,*** without any discrimination.

All Messengers were mortals; human beings endowed with Divine Revelations and appointed by Allah to teach mankind. The Holy Qur'an mentions the names of 25 Messengers and Prophets, and states that there are others. These include Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Their message is the same and it is: ***Islam***, and it all came from One and the Same Source: ***Allah***, and it is to submit to His Will and obey His Law i.e. to become Muslims.

3- A Muslim believes in ***all Scriptures and Revelations*** of Allah, as they were complete and in their original versions.

Revelations were given to guide the people to the right path of Allah, The Qur'an refers to the books revealed to Abraham, Moses , David, Jesus and Muhammad.

Today. the books before the Qur'an do not exist in their original form. They are either lost, corrupted or concealed. Weakness and neglect in the early period of Judaism and Christianity are partly responsible .

Today, the Qur'an is the only authentic and complete book of Allah. No scholar has questioned the fact that Qur'an today is the same as it was more than 1400 years ago. Muslims till today memorize the Qur'an, word by word, as a whole or in part.

Allah who revealed the Qur'an has promised to protect it from being lost, corrupted or concealed; and so it was.

4- A Muslim believes in ***the angels of Allah.***

They are purely spiritual and splendid beings created by Allah. They require no food nor drink nor sleep. They have no physical desires nor material needs.

Angels spend their time in the service of Allah. Each is charged with a certain duty. Angels cannot be seen by the naked eyes. Knowledge and truth are not confined to sensory knowledge or sensory perception alone, because our senses, e.g. sight and hearing, are limited to detecting certain ranges of wavelengths, frequencies ...etc.

5- A Muslim believes in ***the Day of Judgment***

This world, as we know it, will come to an end; and the dead will rise to stand their final and fair trial.

Everything we do, say, make, intend and think is accounted for and kept in accurate records. They are brought up on the Day of Judgment.

People with good records will be generously rewarded and warmly welcomed to Allah's Heaven. People with bad records will be fairly punished and cast into Hell.

The real nature of Heaven and Hell are known to Allah only, but they are described by Allah in man's familiar terms in the Qur'an.

If some good deeds are seen not to get full apperciation and credit in this life, they will receive full compensation and be widely acknowledged on the Day of Judgment.

If some people who commit sins, neglect Allah and indulge in immoral activities; seem ***superficially*** successful and prosperous in this life, absolute justice will be done to them on the Day of Judgment.

The time of the Day of Judgment is only known to Allah and Allah alone.

6- A Muslim believes in ***Qada' and Qadar.***

"Qada' and Qadar" means the Timeless Knowledge of Allah and His Power to plan and execute His plans. Allah is not indifferent to this world, nor is He neutral to it.

Allah is Wise, Just and Loving; and whatever He does must have a good motive, although we may fail sometimes to understand it fully.

We should have strong faith in Allah and accept whatever He does, because our knowledge is limited and our thinking is based on individual consideration, whereas His Knowledge is limitless and He plans on a universal basis.

Man should think, plan and make sound choices; but if things do not happen the way he wants, he should not lose faith and surrender himself to mental strains or shattering worries.

7- A Muslim believes that ***the purpose of life is to worship Allah.***

Worshiping Allah does not mean that we spend our entire lives in constant seclusion and absolute meditation. To worship Allah is to live our life according to His commands, not to run away from it.

To worship Allah is to know Him, to love him, to obey His commands, to enforce His laws in every aspect of life, to serve His cause by doing right and shunning evil; and to be just to him, to ourselves and to our fellow human beings.

8- A Muslim believes that ***man enjoys an especially high ranking status in the hierarchy of all known creatures.***

Man occupies this distinguished position because he alone is gifted with rational faculties and spiritual aspirations as well as powers of action.

Man is not a condemned race from birth to death, but a dignified being potentially capable of good and noble achievements.

9- A Muslim believes that ***every person is born "Muslim".***

Every person is endowed by Allah with spiritual potential and intellectual inclination that can make him a good Muslim.

Every person's birth takes place according to the will of Allah in realization of His plans and in submission to His commands.

10- A Muslim believes that **every person is born free from sin.**

When the person reaches the age of maturity and if he is sane, he becomes accountable for all his deeds and intentions.

Man is free from sin until he commits sin.

There is no inherited sin, no original sin. Adam committed the first sin, he prayed to Allah for pardon and Allah granted Adam pardon.

11- A Muslim believes that ***man must work out his salvation through the guidance of Allah.***

No one can act on behalf of another to intercede between him and Allah.

In order to obtain salvation a person must combine faith ***and*** action, belief ***and*** practice. Faith without doing good deeds is as insufficient as doing good deeds without faith.

12- A Muslim believes that ***Allah does not hold any person responsible until he has shown him the Right Way.***

If people do not know and have no way of knowing about Islam, they will not be responsible

for failing to be Muslims. It is the responsibility of ***every Muslim*** to preach Islam, in words and in action, to all mankind.

13- A Muslim believes that ***faith is not complete when it is followed blindly or accepted unquestioningly***.

Man must build his faith on well-grounded convictions, beyond any reasonable doubt and above uncertainty.

Islam insures freedom to believe, and forbids compulsion in religion (many of the oldest synagogues and many of the oldest churches in the world are in the Muslim countries).

14- A Muslim believes that ***the Qur'an is the word of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel.***

The Qur'an was revealed from Allah on various occasions, to answer questions, solve problems, settle disputes; and to be man's best and permanent guide to the truth.

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic and it is ***still*** in its original and complete Arabic version until today. It is memorized by millions.

The style of the Qur'an could not be matched or emulated with any human speech. Qur'an includes, in precise terms, many specific references to modern scientific concepts; that were far beyond human knowledge at the time of its revelation. These include references to cosmic, geologic, meteorologic, medical, zoological and other domains of knowledge.

15- A Muslim believes in ***a clear distinction between the Qur'an and the Traditions (Sunnah) of Prophet Muhammad***.

Whereas the Qur'an is the word of Allah, the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (his teachings, sayings and actions) are the practical interpretations of the Qur'an,

Both the Qur'an and the Traditions of (Sunnah) of Prophet Muhammad are the primary sources of knowledge in Islam.

II. Worship practice

Allah has laid down for a Muslim four major exercises of faith, some are daily, some weekly, some monthly, some annually and some are required as a minimum of once in a lifetime.

These exercises of faith are to serve man's spiritual purposes, satisfy his human needs and to mark his ***whole life*** with a Divine touch.

These major exercises of faith are:

1- Prayer (Salah)

2- Fasting (Siyam)

3- Charity giving (Zakah)

4- Pilgrimage (Hajj)

1- Prayer (Salah):

Praying to the Creator, on a daily basis, is the best way to cultivate in man a sound personality and to actualize his aspirations.

Allah does not need man's prayer because He is free of all needs. Islamic prayers are for our benefit. The benefits are immeasurable and the blessings are beyond imagination.

In Islamic prayer, every muscle of the body joins the soul and the mind; in the worship and glory of Allah. Islamic prayer is an act of worship.

It is a matchless and unprecedented formula of intellectual meditation and spiritual devotion, of moral elevation and physical exercise; all combined.

Offering of prayers is obligatory upon every Muslim, male or female, who is sane, mature; and in case of women: free from menstruation or confinement due to child birth.

Requirements of prayers: Performing of ablution (Wudu'), purity of the whole body; clothes and ground used for prayer, dressing properly and declaring the intention and facing the ***"Qiblah":*** the direction of the ***Al-Ka'bah*** in Mecca.

Obligatory prayers: Five daily prayers, the Friday's noon congregation prayer and the funeral prayer .

Highly recommended prayers: Those accompanying the obligatory prayers, and the two great festival prayers.

Optional prayers: Voluntary prayers during the day and night .

Times of obligatory prayers:

Early morning (Fajr): after dawn and before sunrise

Noon (Dhuhr): after the sun begins to decline from its zenith until it is about midway on its course to setting.

Mid-afternoon ('Asr): after the expiration of the noon prayer time until sunset.

Sunset (Maghrib): immediately after sunset until the red glow in the western horizon disappears.

Evening ('Isha'): after the expiration of the sunset prayer until dawn.

Prayers should be offered in its due time, unless there is a reasonable excuse.

Delayed obligatory prayers must be made up.

Prayers involve prescribed physical motions, accompanied with saying mainly some parts of the Qur'an,

In addition to the prescribed prayers, a Muslim expresses gratitude to Allah and appreciation of His favors and asks for His Mercy all the time.

Especially at times of for example: Child birth, marriage, going to or rising from bed, leaving and returning to his home, starting a journey or entering a city, riding or driving, before or after eating or drinking, harvesting, visiting graveyards and at time of distress and sickness.

2- Fasting (Siyam):

Fasting is abstaining ***completely*** from eating, drinking, intimate sexual contacts and smoking; from the break of dawn till sunset. It is a matchless Islamic institution which teaches man the principle of sincere love to Allah.

Fasting teaches man a creative sense of hope, devotion, patience, unselfishness, moderation, wise savings, sound budgeting, willpower, mature

adaptability, healthy survival, discipline, spirit of social belonging, unity and brotherhood.

Obligatory fasting is done once a year for the period of the month of Ramadan; the ninth month of the Islamic (Lunar) year.

Recommended fasting: every Monday and Thursday of every week, three days in the middle of each Islamic month, six days after Ramadan following the Feast Day, and a few days of the two months before Ramadan.

Fasting of Ramadan is a worship act which is obligatory on every adult Muslim, male or female; if he/she is mentally and physically fit and not on a journey.

Exception: Women during their period of menstruation and while nursing their child, and also in case of travel and sickness.

3- Charity Giving (Zakah):

It is an act of worship and spiritual investment.

The literal meaning of "Zakah" is purity and it refers to the annual amount, in kind or coin, which a Muslim with means must distribute among the rightful beneficiaries.

Zakah does not only purify the property of the contributor but also purifies his heart from selfishness and greed.

It also purifies the heart of the recipient from envy and jealousy, from hatred and uneasiness; and it fosters instead: good-will and warm wishes for the contributors.

Zakah has a deep humanitarian and socio-political value; for example, it frees the society from class warfare, from ill feelings and distrust, and from corruption.

Every Muslim , male or female, who at the end of the year is in possession of the equivalent of 85 gm of gold (approx. $750 in the year 2001) or more, in cash or articles of trade, must give Zakah at the minimum rate of 2.5%.

Zakah is paid on the net balance after paying personal expenses, family expenses, due credits, taxes.. etc.

The recipients of Zakah are: The poor, the needy, the new Muslim converts, the Muslim prisoners of war (to liberate them), and Muslims in debt. Also, employees appointed to collect Zakah, Muslims in service of research or study or propagation of Islam, and wayfarers who are foreigners in need of help; are entitled to receive Zakah.

Taxes paid to governments do not substitute for this religious duty. A contributor should not seek pride or fame, but if disclosing his name and his contribution is likely to encourage others, it is acceptable to do so..

4- The Pilgrimage (Hajj):

It is a pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in a lifetime; and it is obligatory upon every Muslim, male and female, who is mentally, physically and financially fit.

It is the largest annual convention of faith on earth (3 millions in the year 2001).

Peace is the dominant theme. Peace with Allah, with one's soul, with another, with all living creatures. To disturb the peace of anyone or any

creature in any shape or form is strictly prohibited.

Muslims from all walks of life, from every corner of the globe assemble in Mecca in response of the call of Allah. They go there in glory of Allah, not to worship a man. It is to remember the grand assembly of the Day of Judgment when people will stand equal before Allah.

It is also to commemorate the Divine rituals observed by Prophet Abraham and his elder son Ishmael, who were the first pilgrims to the first house of Allah on earth, i.e. Al-Ka'bah.

Visiting the mosque of Prophet Muhammad at Al-Madinah is highly recommended; but not essential in making the Hajj vaild and complete.

IV. Islam is a code of Life

1. Moral Life

2. Intellectual Life

3. Personal Life

4. Family Life

5. Social Life

6. Economical Life

7. Political Life

8. International Life

1. Moral Life:

Islamic Prescription: The Messenger of Allah, during his 23-years mission has set a human model, as well as detailed teachings, that touched on all aspects of moral behavior. A Muslim is shown how to be honest, truthful, sincere, charitable, modest, merciful, just, chaste, timid,

fidel, and fulfilling his promise. On the other hand, a Muslim should avoid everything opposite to these tributes; as well as: envy, hypocricy, or false flattering, ridicule, obscenity, backbiting, calumny, and vanity.

2. Intellectual Life:

Islamic Prescription: True knowledge, based on clear proofs and indisputable evidence, acquired by experience or experiment or both. The Qur'an points to the rich sources of knowledge in the whole universe.

Islam demands faith in Allah on the basis of knowledge and research, and leaves wide open all fields of thought before the intellect; to penetrate as far as it can reach. There is no church-like institution in Islam.

Knowledge is not monopolized by any sort of clergy. Every Muslim is individually requested to seek knowledge and to act accordingly.

3. Personal Life:

Islamic prescription: Purity and cleanliness, a healthy diet, proper clothing, proper behavior and good healthy sexual relations within marriage.

Harmful foods and drinks are prohibited. These include alcohol and similarly all narcotics, as well as meat of dead or improperly slaughtered animals, and of beasts, swine (pork) and blood poured out. Proper hygienic practices for food handling, hands and mouth cleanliness, as well as moderation in food intake are only some of the teachings of Islam.

4. Family Life:

Islamic Prescription: A family is a human social group, whose members are bound together by the bond of blood ties and/or marital relationship and nothing else (adoption, mutual alliance, common law, trial marriage ... etc.). Parents, and specially mothers, are given fullest respect in Islam, even if they are different in faith.

Marriage is a religious duty on all who are capable of meeting its responsibilities. Each

member of the family has rights and obligations. Marriage contract cannot be valid without the complete free consent of both spouses. The husband is fully responsible to support his wife, even if she is wealthy. He has no right to interfere with the way she manages her own property.

Polygamy (up to four wives) is permissible only to cope with special circumstances, but conditional to the husband being capable to meet the essential needs of his wives and to secure just equality in treatment, which is not easy to everyone. Divorce is resorted to, only as a last solution, if all attempts to reconciliation have failed.

5. Social Life:

Islamic prescription: Man is ordained by Allah to extend his utmost help and kindness to other family members, relations, servants and neighbors. Superiority is not derived from class, color, origin or wealth, but from piety and good deeds alone.

Humanity represents one family springing from one and the same father and mother. The unity of

humanity is not only in its origin but also in its ultimate aims.

6. Economic Life:

Islamic Prescription: Earning one's living through decent labor is not only a duty but a great virtue as well.

Earning is man's private possession. The individual is responsible for the state; and the state is responsible for the security of the individual.

The Islamic economic system is not based on arithmetical calculations alone, but also on morals and principles. Zakah or charity given is a cornerstone (see p. 23).

Man comes to the world empty-handed and departs empty-handed. The real owner of things is Allah alone. Man is simply a trustee. Although Islam does not hinder private enterprise or condemn private possessions, it does not tolerate selfish and greedy capitalism.

Islam adopts a moderate but positive and effective course between individual and society, between the citizen and the state, between capitalism and socialism, between materialism and spiritualism.

Islam has set detailed guidance for commercial transactions to guarantee justice between parties.

Money should be earned only through real investment of resources, work or intellect. Money should not simply reproduce itself. The Islamic substitute to fixed interest on loans is: business partnership, different types of which are legislated in Islam. Islam encourages giving each other "good" loans without any charge (or interest) for the sake of help.

7. Political Life:

Islamic prescription: The sovereignty in the Islamic State belongs to Allah; the people exercise it by trust from Him to enforce His laws. The main mission of the Muslim State is to secure honest application of the Muslim Society, and to convey the message of Islam to all mankind everywhere. Every Muslim, within his own

capacity, has a role in enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong.

The ruler is only an acting executive chosen by the people to serve them according to Allah's law. The State is to administer justice and provide security for all citizens.

Rulers and administrators must be chosen from the best qualified citizens. If an administration betrays the trust of Allah and the people, it has to be replaced.

Crimes that threaten the peace and integrity of the whole society are penalized. These include murder, terrorism, theft, adultery and homosexuality, alcoholism and slander.

Non-Muslims can administer their personal marriage, divorce, foods and inheritance according to the Islamic law, if they so wish, or to their own religious teachings.

They may opt to pay Zakah (Islamic tax) or a different tax "tribute" or "Jizyah". They are entitled to full protection and security of the state, including freedom of religion.

8. International Life:

Islamic prescription: Man everywhere has a common origin, human status and aim. Other people's interests and rights to life, honor and property are respected, as long as the rights of Muslims are intact. Transgression is forbidden.

"Jihad" or holy war means extending help to oppressed people, in order to regain their human rights, so that they can freely choose their own belief and way of life. Islam does not, and never did, force, blackmail or bribe anybody; in order to convert to Islam. On the contrary, Muslims have and are still subjected to various forms of oppression, atrocity, economic pressures and blackmail to abandon their faith. Spain, Palestine, India, Burma, Bosnia, Kosova and Chechnia; are only some historic and contemporary chain of examples. Non-Muslims: Jews and Christians in Muslim societies, have always enjoyed peaceful life, with their rights respected and protected.

War is obligatory if the state security is endangered. During war, destruction of crops, animals and homes, killing non-fighting women, children and aged people are all forbidden.

International treaties are absolutely respected, unless other parties break them first. They cannot be absolved for the sake of temporary political or economic gains.

Epilogue

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, The Ever Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

The All-Merciful, The Ever Merciful.

The Possessor of the Day of Doom.

You only do we worship, and You only do we beseech for help.

Guide us in the straight Path.

The Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring.

[Meaning of the Opening Chapter of the Qur'an]

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